

Youth, Revolt, Recognition

The Young Generation during and after the “Arab Spring”

Edited by Isabel Schäfer



Migration and Youth – A Moroccan Perspective

by Bachir Hamdouch

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Table of Contents

Introduction	
- <i>Isabel Schäfer</i>	1
Part I – Theoretical Perspectives	5
On the Concept of Youth – Some Reflections on Theory	
- <i>Valeska Henze</i>	5
Part II – Youth and Politics in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean	17
Youth as Political Actors after the “Arab Spring”: The Case of Tunisia	
- <i>Carolina Silveira</i>	17
From The Core To The Fringe? The Political Role of Libyan Youth During And After The Revolution	
- <i>Anna Lührmann</i>	27
The Attractiveness of Political Islam for Youth in North Africa	
- <i>Charlotte Biegler-König</i>	35
The Role of Artistic Protest Movements in the Egyptian Revolution	
- <i>Daniel Farrell</i>	45
The „Gezi Generation“: Youth, Polarization and the „New Turkey“	
- <i>Gözde Böcü</i>	52
Part III – Youth, Migration and the Socio-Economic Dimension	62
Reconfiguration of Tunisian Migration Politics after the 'Arab Spring' - The Role of Young Civil Society Movements	
- <i>Inken Bartels</i>	62
Migration and Youth - A Moroccan Perspective	
- <i>Bachir Hamdouch</i>	80
Youth Unemployment in the Southern Mediterranean: Demographic Pressure, Human Development and Policies	
- <i>Wai Mun Hong</i>	86
Authors	107

Migration and Youth - A Moroccan Perspective

Bachir Hamdouch

Introduction: The Evolution and Importance of International Migration for Morocco

Migration is specific to youth as few elderly people emigrate. The Moroccan population living abroad is estimated at 4.5 million people, of which 85% are living in Europe. It represents about 13% of Morocco's population (34 million).¹ More importantly, more than two thirds of Moroccan households are directly affected by international migration, with at least one of their members living abroad or having returned from living abroad. Throughout the country, all walks of life, men and women, all levels of education are affected.

Until the early 1970s, most of the emigrants came from two poor rural areas, Souss - Massa -Draa (South West) and East Rif (North East). Emigrants from the former went predominantly to France and Wallonia in Belgium, while those from the latter to Flanders, the Netherlands and Germany, mostly within the framework of bilateral labor agreements. It was almost exclusively young men, illiterate or with a rudimentary education.

This migration has evolved considerably since the mid-1970s, when Europe severely restricted the entry of workers from the South. Three notable changes occurred: the number of Moroccans living abroad (MLA) has tripled; migration has become 'feminized' and became balanced in terms of gender; and migration patterns have radically changed, from a temporary and circular migration, to permanent migration.²

Remittances reached their peak in 2007 and at 9% of GDP represented the most important source of foreign currency in the country. They have since declined – due to the global economic crisis and tighter immigration controls in Europe – in both absolute and relative terms, representing only 7% of GDP in the period 2008-2014. They are now the second most important source of foreign currency, after tourism but before foreign direct investment.

All this raises the question of the future role of international migration in Morocco, particularly for young people who are the main source of emigrants. What are the recent trends in international migration in Morocco, the changing profile of emigrants, the propensity to emigrate and return? What perspectives (conclusions?) can be drawn? These are the questions to which we (I?) will try to provide answers in this paper.

Recent Trends in International Migration in Morocco

Three important recent trends are emerging: The first trend is less emigration over the past six years, particularly in Europe, due to the global economic crisis affecting most countries of the European Union. According to official statistics registered with the consulates of Morocco, the annual growth rate of MLA³ has been less than 2% since 2008, whereas it was almost 5% in the 1990s and 2000s and

¹ Haut Commissariat au Plan (2012).

² Hamdouch B. & Al. (2000), Hamdouch B. (ed.) (2008).

³ These statistics underestimate the number of MLA, because they record only those who want to register with consulates and who need their services, whether regular or irregular.

over 10% in both the 1970s and 1980s.⁴ So, there has been a progressive reduction in the rate of emigration.

The second trend is more returns of MLA from Europe due to the economic crisis, and from the United States because of the changed social climate post-9/11, but also because of the greater resilience of the Moroccan economy and the improvement of the socio-political context in Morocco. No longer is it only retirees who return to the country, but also recent graduates and other highly skilled young people who have been working in well-paid jobs (finance, management and marketing, new technologies); retired MLA have been returning to Morocco less since the second half of 1970.⁵

Young people returning are often sent by multinational companies for whom they have worked abroad in order to establish or strengthen subsidiaries in Morocco, or they are attracted by high government positions, or opportunities for promising career in major Moroccan public or private companies, or finally by creating their own businesses.⁶

The third trend concerns immigration to Morocco by Europeans, Sub-Saharan Africans, Arabs and those from other continents. Sub-Saharan Africans are now less likely to be in transit to Europe, which is almost inaccessible, and more likely to be migrating to Morocco. It is the same with European and Arab citizens – especially since the "Arab Spring" – and nationals of countries in Asia, particularly those from China.

A new Moroccan immigration policy is being developed and implemented to take the new reality of immigration in Morocco into account.⁷

The Evolution of Moroccan Emigrants' Profiles

Migrants are generally young; the proportion of women has sharply increased; they are more educated and skilled, and finally their destinations are more diversified, although Europe remains predominant.

Young Emigrants

Investigations in Morocco since the 1970s show the continuity of the predominance of young people among the emigrants. The average age at the time of emigration abroad has changed little, ranging between 24 and 25 years since the 1960s. Only in the second half of the 1970s did it fall to 22 years due to the importance of family reunification which followed the cessation of labor migration from the South and change migration model, the transition from a largely circular migration to permanent migration.⁸ Another survey conducted in 2005 indicates that the average age of Moroccans living in Europe was 23 years old at the time of their departure from Morocco. Young people aged 20 to 29 years account for 61% of emigrants; those from 15 to 19 years 15%, and those aged 30 to 39 years 13%.⁹

⁴ ETF/AMERM (Nov. 2012).

⁵ Hamdouch B. (2006 a).

⁶ Hamdouch B. (2006 b), Haut Commissariat au Plan (2006), Association Maroc Entrepreneurs (2007).

⁷ Hamdouch B. (October 2013).

⁸ Hamdouch B. et al (2000).

⁹ Hamdouch B. (ed.) (2008).

Increase of Female Emigration

After the emigration of women within the framework of family reunification, their independent migration is becoming increasingly important. Currently, the Moroccan population living abroad is more balanced in terms of gender: 58% men and 42% women, while in the 1960s and 1970s, the Moroccan population abroad was composed almost exclusively of men. The male / female ratio is more balanced in the old immigration countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) than in the new ones (Italy and Spain).

Increase of Educated and Skilled Profiles

The educational level of emigrants has risen sharply over the past four decades, taking advantage of advances in education in Morocco. The proportion of those without education decreased from 40% in 1960 to 11.5% in 2000 and those who have secondary and higher levels, increased respectively from 26.7% and 2.5%, to 51% and 16%.

Table 1: Evolution of Education Level of Emigrants by Migration Schedule (%)

Period of emigration	Without education	Primary education	Secondary education	Tertiary education	Total
Before 1960	82,8	10,7	6,5	0,0	100
1960-1969	40,0	30,7	26,7	2,5	100
1970-1974	39,4	34,8	25,8	0,0	100
1975-1979	39,5	46,2	13,6	0,7	100
1980-1989	19,0	26,9	41,8	13,3	100
1990-1994	7,9	26,7	50,3	15,2	100
1995-1999	9,6	23,0	50,3	17,1	100
2000-...	11,5	21,3	51,1	16,1	100
Total	21,4	28,4	39,8	10,4	100

Source: Hamdouch B. (ed.) (2008).

The observation of the level of qualification at the time of emigration, as indicated by the 1998 and 2005 surveys, reflects a net increase (see Table 2). The emigration of unskilled people significantly decreased from 41.8% to 24.1. In contrast, the migration of skilled workers has increased from 2.8% to 16.4%. The middle managers (technicians, foremen) fell from 2.7% to 1.6% and that of engineers remained almost stable, from 1.3% to 1.4%.

Table 2: Evolution of the degree of skills (1998, 2005)

Qualification level at the time of emigration	1998 Survey	2005 Survey
Without qualification	41,8	24,1
Low skilled worker	35,5	10,7
Skilled worker	2,8	16,4
Technician	2,1	1,3
Foreman	0,6	0,3
Engineer	1,3	1,4
Other	15,9	45,7

Source: Hamdouch B. et al (2000), Hamdouch B. (ed.)(2008).

More Diversified Destinations

There has been a double diversification over the past few decades: Firstly in Europe, from traditional reception countries (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) to new ones (Spain, Italy, UK, Scandinavia...). Secondly, to countries in other continents: North America (Canada and United States), Gulf Arab countries... Other ancient destinations, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, are maintained, and still others, Maghreb countries, varied according to the political uncertainties including the "Arab Spring."

Propensity to Emigrate

Levels of youth emigration from Morocco are not very different from those of other countries. A survey was conducted in 2011 by Fondapol in 25 countries. The sample is one thousand young people aged 16-29 years in each of the selected countries. It appears that the propensity to migrate is 29% in Morocco, barely higher than in Russia (28%) or Mexico (27%), but lower than in South Africa and Estonia (31%), and even lower than in Greece (35%) and Romania (41%).¹⁰ The ETF survey, conducted in Morocco in 2012, gives more details.¹¹ Interviewees are between 18 and 50 years old. It distinguishes between the people based on their emigration potential (41.8 %): those with a low propensity to emigrate – those who express a wish or desire to emigrate (28.5%) – and those with a high propensity – those who have begun to prepare – who make up only half the amount of those with a low propensity (13.3%).

- The same survey shows the profile of potential migrants:
- They are young: 50% are 18-29 and 30% are 30-39 years old.
- There are more men than women (60%/ 40%).

¹⁰ Le Matin du Sahara (4 March 2011).

¹¹ Project ETF/AMERM (November 2012).

- They are single: men / women (62 %/49 %).
- They are more educated, but this is a contributing factor, not a determining one.

Usually, they are not unemployed. Unemployment is a factor encouraging emigration, though it is not criteria. Although there is a positive correlation between unemployment and the propensity to emigrate, only 21% of those who want to emigrate are unemployed compared to 45% of those who work. Thus the purpose of the migration is more to improve income levels and standard of living rather than simply to find a job. This finding is confirmed by previous investigations on the employment situation of emigrants just before departure. However, the same surveys show that the proportion of unemployed increased among the emigrants in recent decades, due to the degradation of the employment situation, particularly for young people, with the arrival of wave of new entrants into the labor market.¹²

Conclusion and Outlook

International migration is important to Morocco. It primarily concerns young people. However, it has undergone significant changes in recent decades as a result of many factors, including contrasting economic fortunes in Morocco, in other countries of the Mediterranean and in Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in Europe. The socio-political and demographic circumstances in all of these countries, as well as their respective migration policies have also played a considerable role.

The profile of Moroccan emigrants has evolved. If they are still mostly young, they are more educated and skilled, the proportion of women has increased, with almost as many women emigrating as men, and finally, their destinations are more diversified, although the predominance of Europe remains. Recent trends from the current global economic crisis indicate less emigration from Morocco, more returns and more immigration, in particular of Sub-Saharan Africans and Europeans to Morocco. The propensity of Moroccan youth to emigrate is the same as that of many other countries; it is even lower than that of similar countries. Prospects after the economic crisis are uncertain and depend on the demographic and socio-economic developments in the regions South, East and North of Morocco as well as in Morocco itself, and last but not least on cyclical surges and public policies of both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

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